

ALVA M. MURDOCK



Alva Moroni Murdock was born April 26, 1857, in Carson Valley, Nevada. His parents, Joseph Stacy Murdock and Elizabeth Hunter Murdock, had been sent to Carson Valley on a colonizing mission by Brigham Young in 1856.

In 1857, when the crops were ready to harvest, they were called back to Salt Lake by Brigham Young because of the invasion of Johnston's army, and were told to bring ammunition from California.

Alva's father had to sell his ranch and crops as they stood, ready to harvest, to some Texans on their way to the California goldfields for horses and wagons to make the return journey to Utah.

Ten years of hard pioneering followed for the Murdock family, first in American Fork and later in Heber City, where Alva's father, Joseph Stacy Murdock, was the first bishop and also first representative to the State Legislature from Wasatch County. There always was progress, though. A stone home was built in Heber; children were sent to school, and life became somewhat easier.

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However, Joseph Murdock's organizational ability was too valuable to the Church to allow him to enjoy the comparative ease and security of the then well-established Heber City, and once more came the call to assist in colonizing, this time in southern Nevada in what is known as the Muddy Mission. So, in 1867, the Murdock family moved to the south, settling near the town of Moapa on the Muddy River.

The settlers had paid their taxes to Utah and to Arizona, only to find they were in Nevada, where more taxes were demanded. So, after a visit from Brigham Young, whom Alva says he remembers clearly, the project was abandoned for the time being and homes, orchards and 1,000 bushels of wheat were left behind.

The Murdock children were very happy to leave and when the father looked back as they came to a rise in the ground, he could see smoke rising. When asked about it, Alva admitted he had lighted the match, so they could not decide to turn back.

It was the trip to and from the Muddy Mission and the life there that is given credit for one of the outstanding habits of Alva's life. Because of the heat and mosquitoes, most of the travel was accomplished at night. Alva drove a yoke of oxen almost the entire way, although he was just a mere lad.

In 1870, when they reached Provo, the father, knowing that there were many mouths to feed, succeeded in securing the first government contract for carrying mail from Provo, by way of Heber and Kamias to Echo. Here the boys were put to work in relays with horses.

Interest in livestock became the deciding factor in Alva's destiny and was responsible for his entry into the Uintah Basin. He and Jim Clyde undertook to ride herd on a thousand head of cattle belonging to Heber residents, grazing them in the broad expanse of Strawberry Valley, now under the waters of Strawberry Reservoir. This herd was known as the Co-op herd and gave the name to Co-op Creek, which was a favorite camping spot for the herders.

In about 1875, when the feed in Strawberry Valley seemed inadequate for the cattle, the ranchers wanted them to graze. Alva and Jim Clyde decided to investigate

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the basin, where the season was a little longer, and they rode along the Strawberry River and in Sam's and Slabb Canyons.

Feed in these canyons was then luxurious, according to Alva, and the men thought that if they just owned these two canyons they would have everything any cattleman might desire. Here was born an ambition which years later was realized. Not content even with this, the two young men went on down into the basin, prospecting the entire region, much of which was held as an Indian reservation.

The final result was the leasing of the entire basin by Alva, Jim Clyde and a third man, Charles Carter, for \$1,000 a year, from the Indian agent, with the stipulation that they confine their herd to cattle, barring horses and sheep which might get mixed with stock belonging to the Indians. The following year their herd increased to 3,000 head of cattle.

When he was just a little over 20, Alva married Josephine Nicol, born January 25, 1859, in Salt Lake City, Utah, daughter of Thomas and Johanna Handberg Nicol.

Alva and his wife were married in Salt Lake City on June 24, 1877, but made their home in Heber, and he recalls he was denied much of the pleasure of the usual young groom starting his home. Just three weeks after his marriage he suddenly was faced with the situation of a man whom he had hired to take care of his cattle in the basin, demanding more money, and rather than pay the increase, Alva took over the horse, saddle and provisions he had provided for the herder and went to the basin himself. Since there was no one to relieve him, he stayed there with the cattle, eventually finding himself snowed in. It was nine months before he was able to return the next spring to his bride.

Time for the next years was divided between the basin and Heber, though Alva kept his family in Heber some time. At Heber his energy took him to such occupations as timbering and saw milling.

In the meantime, Alva was becoming a man of importance in Heber, where he was constantly interested in civic improvement. Among other responsible positions there was that of early school trustee, and his interest in education never diminished. Ven-

tures there included a livery stable business and a stage line to Park City. And when the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad built a branch line into Heber in 1899, it broadened the market for livestock and he took a great many selling trips East, besides supplying Park City markets with beef.

His family, too, was increasing. His first daughter, Hannah Elizabeth, was born October 30, 1878, and died a year later. Ida Josephine, now Mrs. Oscar A. Kirkham, was born July 10, 1880, followed by two other daughters, Dora and Vern.

It was in 1885, when Vern was still a little girl, that Alva decided to establish a trading post at Whiterocks and took his wife and three daughters there to live. While he operated the trading post, his wife ran a boarding house for officials of the government agency. This took much of Mrs. Murdock's time and sometimes for the entire day little Vern would be taken over by the Indians.

The keen understanding of the Indians by Joseph Stacy Murdock—his father—seemed to have been passed on to the son Alva, for he stood in good stead both in his trading with the Indians and in his many associations with them. The Indians learned to consider him a friend and adviser, and held him in so much respect that in all the years he has run cattle in the basin it has never been proven that any Indian ever killed or stole a Murdock animal. He spoke and understood their language and they regarded each other as friends.

Then came the move to the basin to establish his permanent home when it was thrown open to homesteaders in 1905. By this time he was well known and established, both in Heber and in the basin, among whites and Indians alike. He was a man of resources and accomplishments, able to see and grasp opportunities and with the resourcefulness to carry through his projects.

On the day before opening, Alva, by special permit, was allowed to come in to establish a store and other accommodations to provide for the expected settlers. He brought in two wagons and a big circus tent, which he set up beside an old cabin which he bought from an Indian, Segusie Jack. In the cabin he kept his merchandise

while the tent became a store, boarding house and community center for homesteaders who flocked in to select their lands. Later a huge bonfire was built near the tent, around which were gathered 52 men, and Dora, his daughter, the only woman on the town-site. Grant was the only boy on the camp-site. In honor of the occasion the crowd voted to call the settlement Dora, the name it carried for some time or until the post office was established under the name Theodore.

Owning the home-ranch had been a dream of the family for years, and when it was finally secured on the Strawberry River, Alva and Josephine made a trip to Salt Lake and had planned a trip to the coast to improve her health. This was not to be, however, and in three weeks she was dead. Her passing occurred February 3, 1913, at the home of her son-in-law, Oscar A. Kirkham.

Alva then put all his energy into building up the ranch to make it a real home for his children and their friends. He had three summer homes built for Ida, Dora and Vern and their families, and a place of fun and entertainment in the large ranch house for his younger family, along with the work that necessarily had to be done.

After World War I, a financial crash came to Alva, as it did to many others, and he also realized that a home was not a home without a mother. So, in October, 1915, he married Ivy Stephens Liddell, and on April 7, 1919, his son, Willard S., was born.

In the meantime, many of his large family had been married and were living in homes of their own, some in the basin and others scattered about Utah and other states.

Of his 11 children, two died in infancy, and Merle and Wells as adults, Dora Ryan passing away in December, 1958. The others are Mrs. Oscar A. Kirkham, Salt Lake; Mrs. R. S. Lusty and Grant, Murdock, Duchesne; Mrs. Hazel M. Murray, Willits, California; Mrs. J. C. Hansen, Helper, Utah; Ralph C. Murdock, Whitman, Nebraska; and Willard S. Murdock, Roosevelt, Utah.

Although Alva's health was failing, he was still active in civic and home affairs, and rode his favorite horse daily. At a meeting on February 2, 1944, he was elected general chairman for the Duchesne County

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Fair Committee. He had also been president of the Chamber of Commerce and the year before had been chairman of the Duchesne County Stampede.

However, his family insisted he should seek medical aid in Salt Lake City, and he underwent an operation. He later was taken to the home of his daughter, Mrs. Oscar A. Kirkham, where all thought he was improving until the morning of November 1, 1944. He realized the end was near and asked Oscar to say a prayer, and a great spirit passed on. 440